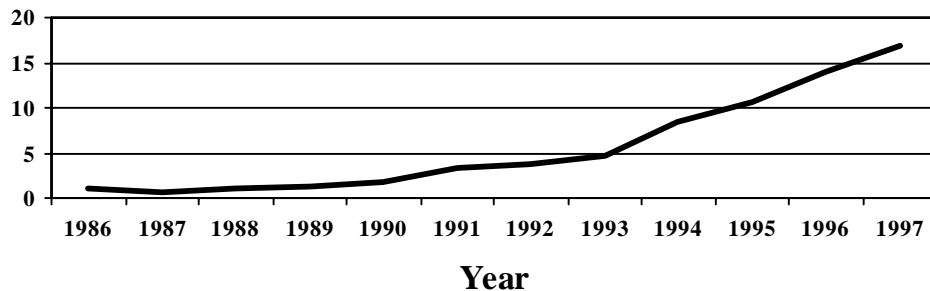


MRFSS Striped Bass Report



1997 Atlantic Coast Recreational Fishery

Millions of Striped Bass Caught



Atlantic Coast Highlights

- Nearly 17 million striped bass were caught (including released alive) during 1997 from Maine through North Carolina.
- This is a 21% increase from 1996.
- Represents the largest recorded catch since the survey began in 1979. (Figure 1)
- Striped bass catch rates and harvest rates in 1997 continued the increasing trend which started in the late 1980's. (Figure 2)
- Directed striped bass trips (defined as any trip where an angler targeted or caught a striped bass), exceeded 8 million in 1997 (Figure 3)
- Approximately 1 in 4 saltwater trips made from Maine to North Carolina in 1996 and 1997 were directed at striped bass.
- The 1995-1997 average total striped bass catch is almost 2.5 times the 1992-1994 average striped bass catch
- More striped bass were caught in the past three years (1995-1997) than from 1983-1994 combined.
- As a result of management regulations and the growing popularity of "catch and release" fishing, over 90% of the striped bass caught since 1987 have been released alive.
- The total harvest estimate (excluding released alive) of striped bass in 1997 was 1.45 million fish.
- This represents a 12.5% increase from 1996 and is the highest harvest estimate since 1979.
- Weight of harvested striped bass in 1997 (14.86 million pounds) exceeded the 1996 estimate by over 250,000 pounds and was the highest estimate recorded since the MRFSS began.

Geographic Catch Distribution by State

- In 1997 Massachusetts accounted for the greatest proportion of the total catch (33%) followed by Maryland (25%) and Virginia (9%). (Figure 4)
- Virginia accounted for the most striped bass harvested in 1997 followed by Maryland and Massachusetts.
- States showing large harvest increases from 1996 to 1997 included Maine (tripled their pounds harvested), Massachusetts (120,000 more fish), and North Carolina (more than doubled their harvest).
- In terms of harvest weight in 1997, New York was ranked number one with 25% of the coastwide total followed by Massachusetts (19%) and Virginia (18%).
- Both Maryland and New Jersey showed a 5% increase in striped bass release from 1996-1997.

Seasonal Catch Distribution

- In the North Atlantic subregion (Maine through Connecticut) the majority of the total catch and harvest for 1996 and 1997 occurred from May through October (Figure 5)
- No striped bass were recorded as being caught in January or February for the entire Atlantic coast area.
- Over 60% of the catch for the Mid-Atlantic region was done in the months of July-October. (Figure 6)

Catch Distribution by Mode

- The private/rental boat mode accounted for 80% of the total striped bass catch and 77% of the total harvest in 1997. (Figure 7)
- Shore mode angling accounted for 16% of the striped bass caught in 1997.
- The 1997 total for the headboat/charterboat mode was a mere 35% of the headboat/charterboat total for 1996. (1997 total: 599685)
- The headboat/charterboat mode made up 14% of the total harvest in 1997.
- Only 8% of the bass caught from shore in 1997 were harvested.

Summary

- Recreational fishing opportunities for Atlantic Coast striped bass continue to improve.
- The trend toward a growing conservation ethic among striped bass anglers continues.
- Many avid anglers and charterboat captains now consider striped bass an exclusively “catch and release” fishery.
- While “catch and release” fishing has played an important role in the recovery of striped bass, as its popularity grows so does the number of mortalities related to hooking and handling.
- With over 15.5 million fish released alive, hooking mortality can be a significant component of the overall fishing mortality.
- Through continued striped bass research efforts and angler education programs we can ensure that the healthy, fully recovered stocks which inhabit our waters today will be a resource to enjoy for many years to come.

MRFSS Striped Bass Catch Estimates Maine through North Carolina

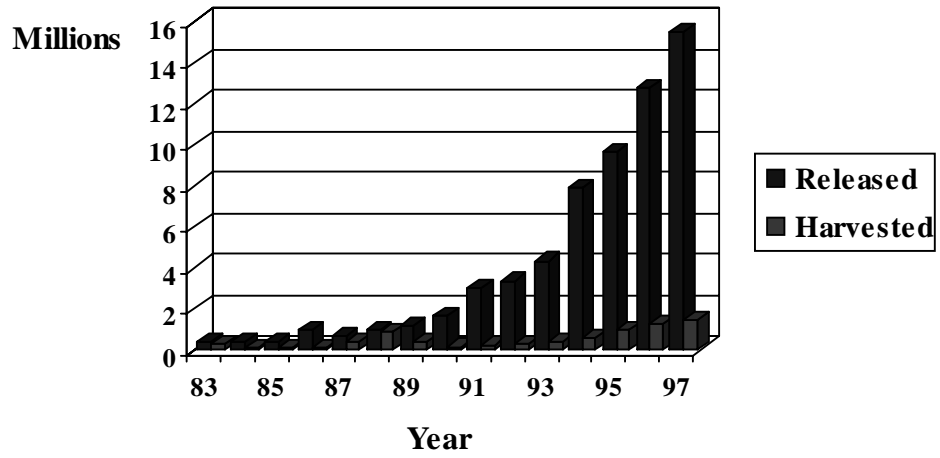


Figure 1

Estimated Total Trips and Striped Bass Catch Rates, Maine-North Carolina

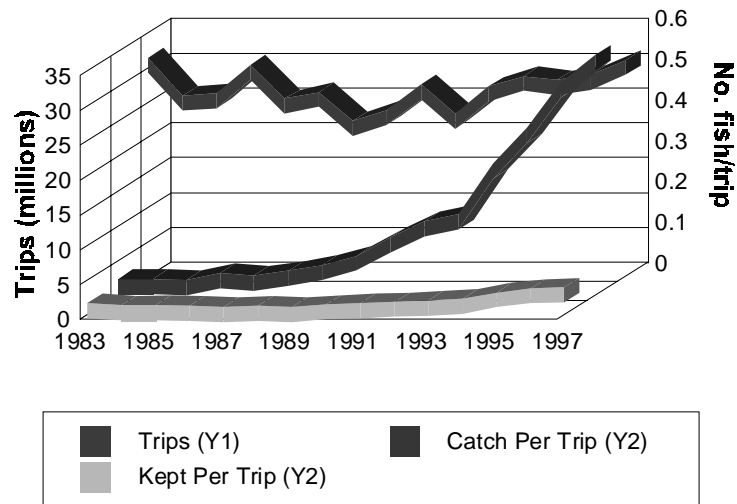


Figure 2

Estimated Targeted Trips for Striped Bass from Maine to North Carolina

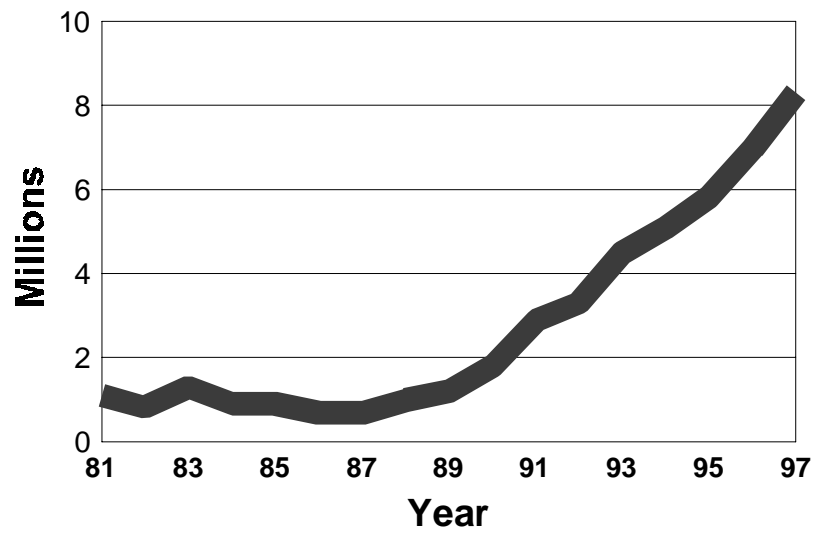
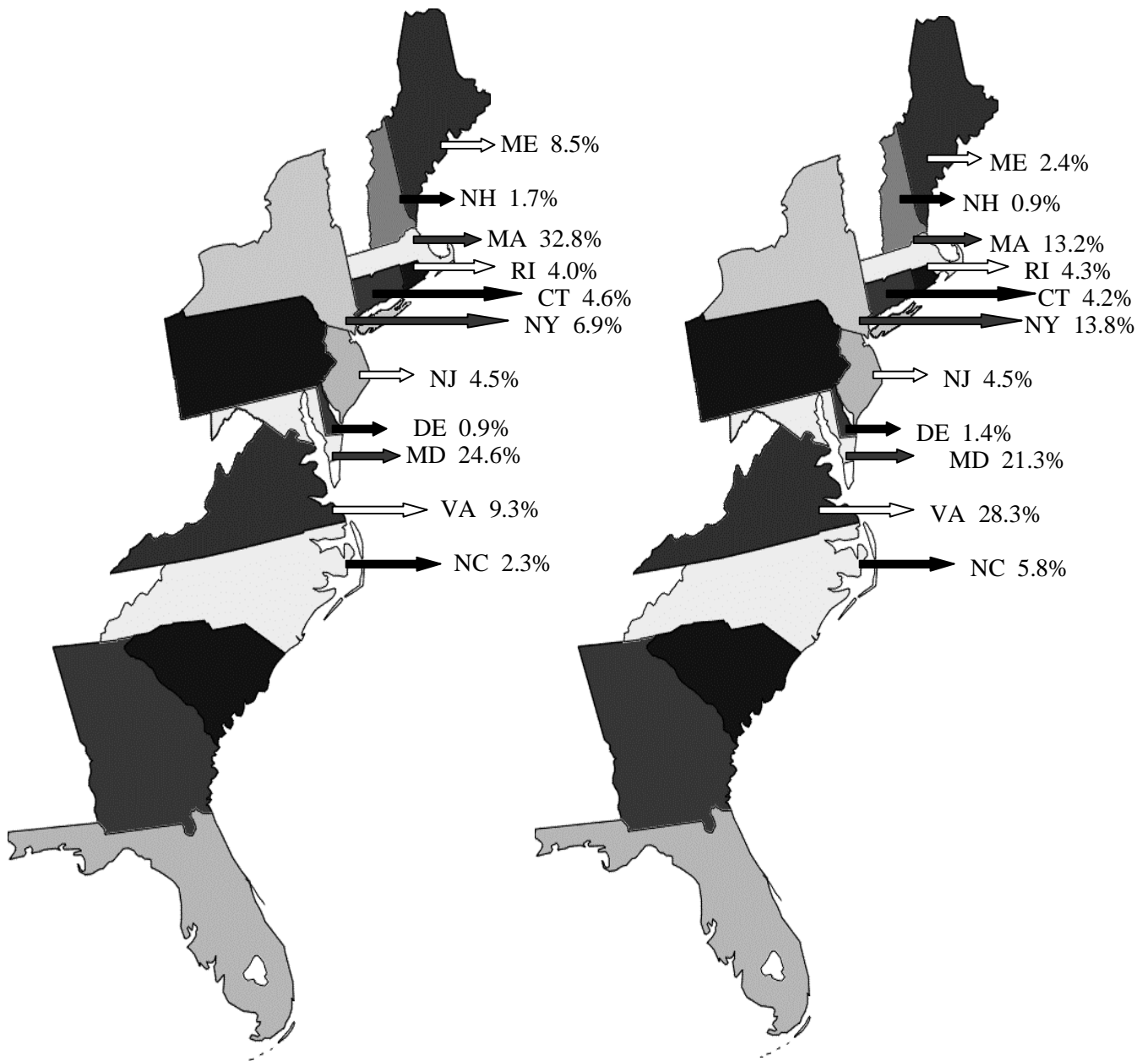


Figure 3

Figure 4. Striped Bass Catch and Harvest Distribution by State



Striped Bass 1997
Total Catch %

Striped Bass 1997
Total Harvest %

North Atlantic Striped Bass Catch

Seasonal Trend

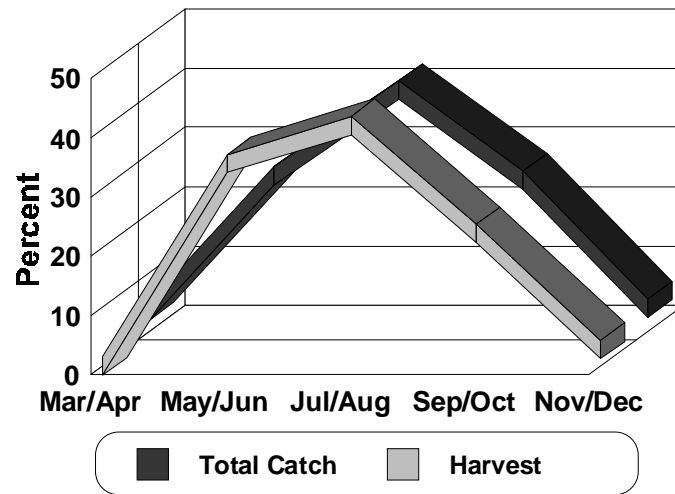


Figure 5

Mid-Atlantic Striped Bass Catch

Seasonal Trend

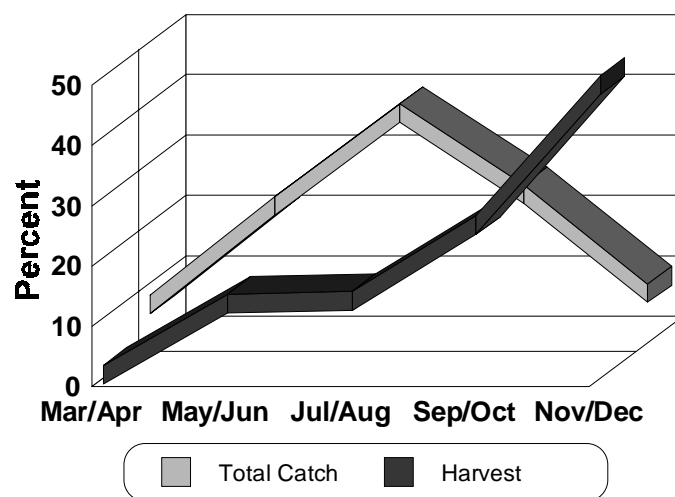


Figure 6

Striped Bass Catch Maine through North Carolina by Fishing Mode

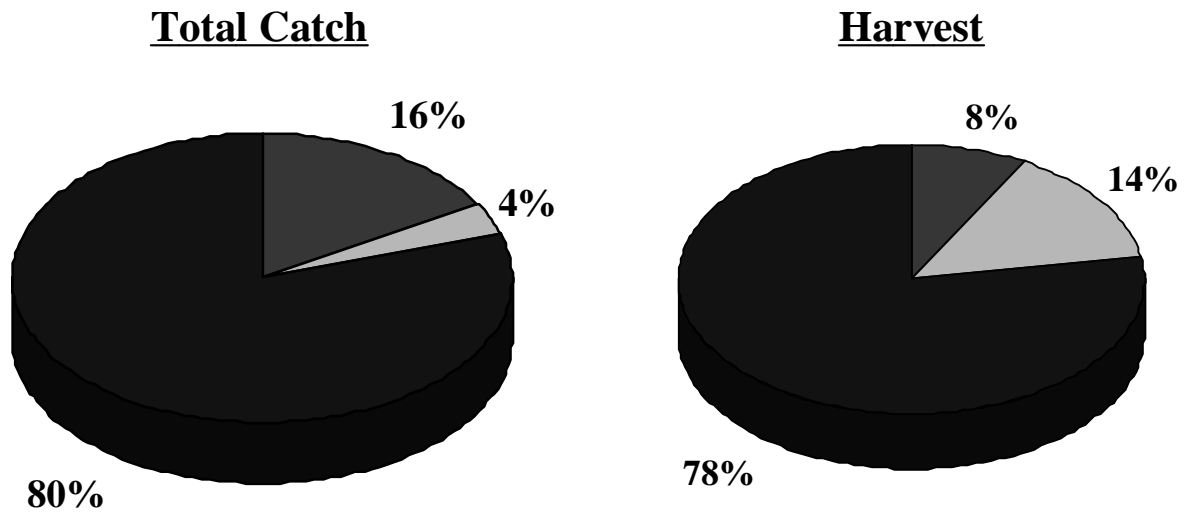
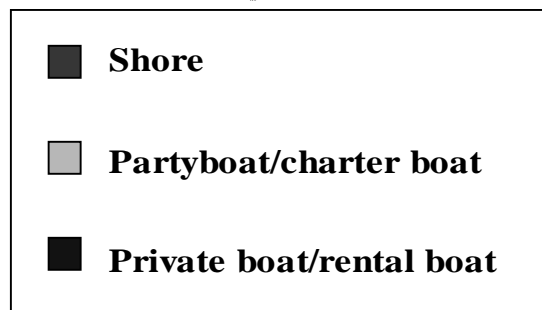
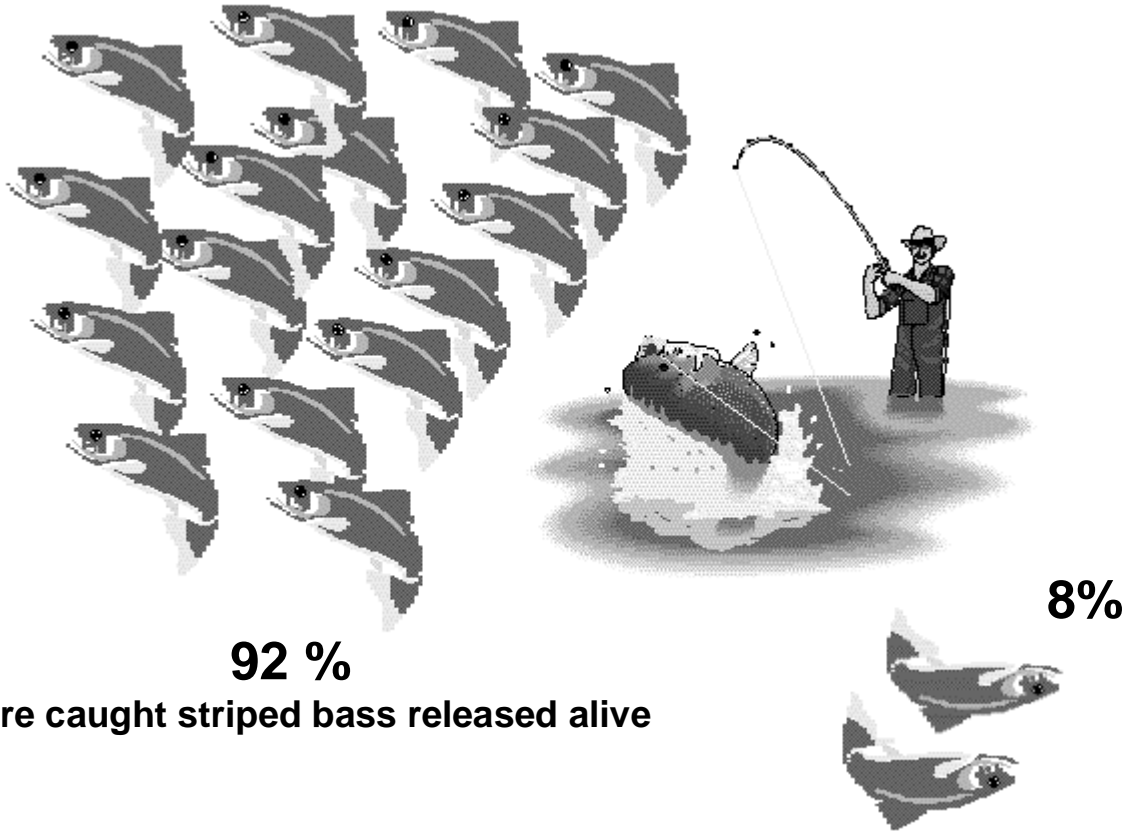


Figure 7



Catch and release.....it's catching on!!!



Shore caught striped bass released alive